



MUSIC OF RUSSIA

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# MUSIC OF RUSSIA

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- ❖ The music of Russia is steeped in age-old traditions.
- ❖ Solo singing is common among herders, string instruments mix with accordions in the folk music of farming communities, and a strong legacy of choral music is found in cities and towns throughout the region.
- ❖ Despite the wide variety of ethnic groups and customs in Russia, several broadly similar patterns exist, allowing for a unification of the population through music.

# EARLY SACRED MUSIC

- ❖ Russian liturgical music has a long history that spans more than a thousand years.
- ❖ Instrumental music was strictly forbidden in churches and during religious services; only vocal music was allowed.
- ❖ Ancient Byzantine choral melodies were sung in Russia up until the seventeenth century.
- ❖ These early pieces are difficult to recreate today, however, because they were written in a special type of notation that only showed the general shape of the melody, not the exact notes.



# EARLY SACRED MUSIC



- ❖ Unlike choruses today who refer to sheet music for each note of the songs they sing, singers of long ago committed entire songs to memory.
- ❖ Today Russian Orthodox choral music still has an important place in religious ceremonies and in churches throughout the nation.

# VOCAL CHORUSES

- ❖ There is something about a large group of people singing together that reaches deeply into the hearts of human beings.
- ❖ Russia's choral music brings about strong emotions in both the performer and the listener.
- ❖ Songs often begin with a solo voice, which is later joined by others in unison.
- ❖ After a period of singing in unison, the singers break into different parts of harmony.



# VOCAL CHORUSES



- ❖ Throughout Russia there are folk choruses that sing in complex harmonies for social events and also for religious services in the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- ❖ Russian choral singing is characterized by changes in density, or dynamic range.
- ❖ The music can begin in soft tones and then suddenly become very loud, or a single voice might be immediately followed by the overwhelming power of an entire choir singing together.



# VOCAL CHORUSES

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- ❖ Music plays a powerful role in the way it can bind communities together.
- ❖ The practice and hard work required to sing complex vocal harmonies symbolically and literally represents one's ability to live in harmony within a community.
- ❖ Only through many years of practicing together can a group of singers master the unwritten rules of blending their voices.

# FOLK MUSIC

- ❖ Folk music in Russia is performed by a wide variety of ethnic groups in the region.
- ❖ Each small group has its own traditions, customs, and ways of life.
- ❖ These groups' lifestyles are reflected in folk songs, which are handed down through oral tradition from one generation to the next.







# FOLK MUSIC

- ❖ Some traditional songs are believed to have magical powers that protect people from evil spirits.
- ❖ Love songs sometimes compare human yearnings to caged birds, whose hearts cannot sing until they are set free.
- ❖ Other songs are connected to the natural environment, and are used for planting and harvesting crops, and to give rise to the astronomical cycles that divide the year into light and dark seasons.
- ❖ At weddings, guests are often entertained by storytellers who chant or sing epic tales, some of which may contain thousands of verses.



# FOLK MUSIC

- ❖ Among Russians and other Slavic peoples, an important musical form used especially at weddings and funerals is the lament.
- ❖ For many centuries, village brides have sung laments during the few days before a wedding, since at this time, they get ready to leave their homes to move in with their new husband's family.
- ❖ Laments are also used to aid in the process of grieving when a loved one passes away.
- ❖ These songs are characterized by loud wailing.
- ❖ They do not have a strong rhythmic structure.
- ❖ The singing sounds somewhat like howling and contains sliding notes and vocal flutters similar to yodeling.



# FOLK MUSIC

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- ❖ There is a type of Russian folk song called “chastushka,” which consists of short verses sung, composed, and improvised mostly by girls.
- ❖ This type of singing became popular in the late 1800s when rural villagers migrated to larger towns and cities to look for work.
- ❖ Many of these songs speak about love and personal relationships, but lyrics also reflect work and political issues.
- ❖ The chastushka was once a favorite music style promoted by the government.
- ❖ Although government influence over the population has diminished in recent years, the chastushka is still heard in Russia.

# HERDING MUSIC AND THROAT SINGING



- ❖ The vast grasslands of southern Siberia are home to nomadic and semi-nomadic people who herd mainly sheep, cattle, camels, or yaks.
- ❖ These herders share a rich oral music tradition, with special emphasis on solo singing, storytelling, and string music.



## HERDING MUSIC AND THROAT SINGING

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- ❖ The most characteristic ethnic music from this region comes from Tuva, a tiny autonomous republic near the Russian border with Mongolia.
- ❖ The Tuvans' music is a strange and unusual type of singing called throat singing, or overtone singing.
- ❖ By contracting and expanding muscles in the throat, larynx, tongue, and jaw, one singer can produce two notes simultaneously by selectively bringing out the harmonics (overtones) naturally present in the human voice.

# HERDING MUSIC AND THROAT SINGING



- ❖ In this way, one person can sing both melody and accompaniment; a good form of companionship and entertainment for those lonely nomadic journeys with their herds.
- ❖ In this ancient style of singing, the high, whistling sound is most often meant to imitate the sound of birds, horses, or wind whistling through the grass and trees.
- ❖ Throat singing is also common with herders in neighboring Outer Mongolia.

# HERDING MUSIC AND THROAT SINGING

- ❖ Tuvans share with Mongolians and other Asian herding peoples a family of instruments called horsehead fiddles, which may be the ancient ancestors of the European violin.
- ❖ In these remote areas, the horse is often the only means of transport and as such commands great respect.
- ❖ Horsehead fiddles are covered with horsehide.
- ❖ The strings are made from horse gut and the bow is made of horsehair.
- ❖ At the end of the fiddle's neck, a carved wooden horse head is attached.
- ❖ Many of the songs and melodies played on these instruments relate stories about horses and about traveling.



# RUSSIAN FOLK INSTRUMENTS

- ❖ There is a rich variety of folk instruments in Russia.
- ❖ The most popular one is the balalaika, which probably appeared in Russia during the seventeenth century.
- ❖ It was common to hear the balalaika in the courts of the czar.





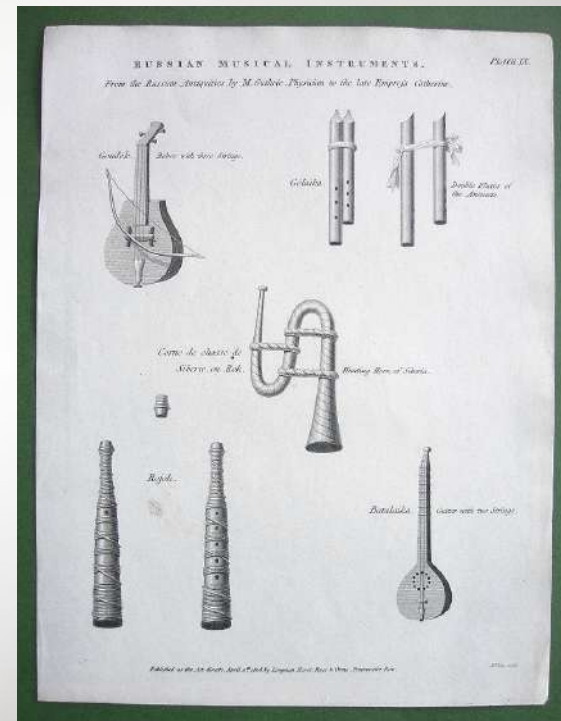
# RUSSIAN FOLK INSTRUMENTS



- ❖ The balalaika is also a part of everyday life in small villages throughout the region.
- ❖ This national instrument of Russia has a triangular wooden body, three strings, and a long neck.
- ❖ It ranges in size and tone from soprano to bass.

# RUSSIAN FOLK INSTRUMENTS

- ❖ Another Russian instrument, the rojok, is a trumpet carved from a single piece of wood, usually an apple tree.
- ❖ For hundreds of years, this instrument has been the favorite of shepherds and cowherds, who use it to call and herd their animals.



# RUSSIAN FOLK INSTRUMENTS



- ❖ Lojki are wooden spoons used as percussion instruments and played especially at weddings and other village celebrations.

# RUSSIAN FOLK INSTRUMENTS

- ❖ The bandoura is a large, short-necked lute with an almost circular face and up to 30 strings.
- ❖ Playing techniques incorporate strumming and individual fingering of the strings.



# RUSSIAN FOLK INSTRUMENTS



- ❖ Accordions are very common and well loved in Russia.
- ❖ The livenskaya accordion produces different notes depending on whether air is squeezed into or pulled out of the bellows.
- ❖ The bayan accordion has 52 melody keys for the right hand and 100 bass notes and chords for the left hand.

# CLASSICAL AND MODERN MUSIC



- ❖ Russia today boasts great symphony orchestras and some of the finest classical musicians in the world.
- ❖ The most famous Russian classical composer was Peter Tchaikovsky, whose most recognizable compositions are “The Nutcracker” and his ballets, “Swan Lake” and “The Sleeping Beauty”.



# CLASSICAL AND MODERN MUSIC

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- ❖ Rock music is quite popular in Russia, especially in the large cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, where original compositions as well as cover tunes of Western rock stars are regularly heard in the clubs.
- ❖ In the 1970s and 1980s, rock music was an important vehicle for protesting the Soviet Communist regime.
- ❖ It had a strong effect in uniting young people for a single cause.
- ❖ In recent years, jazz has also seen a rise in popularity, and Russian jazz musicians regularly perform and tour on the international circuits.



# MUSIC IN RUSSIA

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❖ Because of the cultural diversity in Russia, and despite the uniformity promoted by the government of the former Soviet Union, this region offers a wide range of music and artistic expression.